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ABSTRACT

Confluent education is defined as the deliberate and purposeful evocation by responsible and identifiable agents of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and feelings that flow together to produce wholeness in the person and society. Confluent education is distinct from experience-based education, psychological education, affective education, emotional education, and personal growth education in that it includes an external structure that integrates subject matter and personal awareness, an intellectual component, and abstract knowledge or information. The perspective on confluent education presented in this essay is rooted in phenomenology and the philosophy of M. Merleau-Ponty and involves the design of instruction. Engaging students in various modes of discipline-based analysis and inquiry will help them draw their own implications from their observations. Participation in discipline-based inquiry would ultimately help students learn to conduct their own lives with integrity, based on the integration of knowledge and acts of love. It is argued that a coherent conception of confluent education entails active engagement of students in impassioned scholarly apprenticeships. Within this context of discipline-based guided inquiry, modeled by teachers and adapted for students, the cognitive has substance and purpose in the integration of dimensions of human learning. (Contains 28 references.) (SLD)

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REFLECTIONS ON CONFLUENT EDUCATION AS DISCIPLINE-BASED INQUIRY

Steve Hackbarth

Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, March, 1997, Chicago

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Reflections on Confluent Education as Discipline-Based Inquiry

Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago, March 27, 1997.

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Discipline-Based Inquiry as a Means of Integrating Cognitive, Affective, and Behavioral Dimensions of Learning

It is commonly recognized that scholars in the various academic disciplines direct their attention to certain aspects of the perceptual universe in order to contribute to the ever evolving body of valid and reliable public knowledge. From the perspective of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, the **affective dimension** of their learning is manifested in the distinctive structure of their **inquiry behavior**, a structure that has been cultivated and refined by disciplined (in both senses) study and years of experience. As perceiving organisms, scientists constitute their shared worlds as they persist in exploration of selected phenomena. What they observe at a given time and in a given context cannot be ascertained by merely, as it were, looking over their shoulders as if the objects stretched out before their gaze were readily accessible to all. It is only by apprehending the world from their situated perspective, within their experiential and theoretical framework, that we can begin to share their vision.

Each of the academic disciplines, and the inter-disciplinary connections among them, contribute content to the school curriculum that students are required to assimilate as an essential component of their full human development. The admittedly perspectival, tentative, and distilled knowledge that they contain, rooted in fully engaged perception (contrasted with the presumed objective, detached gaze of scientism), constitutes the **cognitive dimension** of learning when viewed from the perspective of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy.

A key to understanding integrated learning from Merleau-Ponty's perspective is to recognize the **role of purposive human action**—as it reflects all of those dimensions of affectivity expressed in mentalistic language, from moods to aspirations—in perception, and consequently **in the dynamic construction of the academic disciplines**. In his thesis of the primacy of perception, Merleau-Ponty (1962) asserted that knowledge arises from reflections upon immediate perceptual experience: "All my knowledge of the world, even my scientific knowledge, is gained from my own particular point of view, or from experience of the world without which the symbols of science would be meaningless" (p. viii). Merleau-Ponty rejected the world views of both realism (the knowable world exists independent of our minds) and idealism (the knowable world exists only in our minds). He held that a firm, non-arbitrary foundation for reliable knowledge was to be found in the "world-as-perceived."

Merleau-Ponty's account of human existence as being a particular "body-subject" precludes a mentalistic interpretation of affectivity. "Anger, shame, hate, and love," he claimed, "are not psychic facts hidden at the bottom of another's consciousness; they are types of behavior or styles of conduct [that] are visible from the outside" (1964b, p. 52). His rejection of mentalism is as firm as is his rejection of mechanistic behaviorism, objectivism, and scientism (as well as of moral relativism). Our physical activities constitute "the visible form of our intentions" (1964a, p. 5). Behavior, for Merleau-Ponty, can only be

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properly understood as the purposive action of a living being. Clearly, it is only by means of empathic observation of human action that the widely shared language of affectivity arises for each individual and in every culture. Our bodies bear witness not simply to what we feel or think but to what we are: "a living body's slightest reflex expresses the total subject's fundamental way of being in the world" (1964b, p. 108). Furthermore, ". . . each person is nothing more nor less to us than this structure [of conduct] or way of being in the world" (1964b, p. 53). Thus, from the perspective of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, **the confluence of cognitive and affective/behavioral dimensions of learning, may be interpreted in terms of what occurs when people engage actively and reflectively in pursuits of knowledge, whether to solve pressing problems or to satisfy burning curiosity.**

Within the context of formal education, we may tentatively judge the cognitive and affective/behavioral dimensions of learning to be integrated **when students participate actively and reflectively in adapted, yet identifiable forms of inquiry that have in the past and continue to give rise to the emergence of the academic disciplines.** It is not sufficient for students to mechanically follow prescribed routines. Confronted with the elaborate structures of knowledge in textbook form, teachers might be led to believe that their students must commit as much information to memory as possible within a limited time period. Like the technicians who have precipitated a "crisis of the understanding" in modern science, some teachers might forget about the significance that lived phenomena have for a full comprehension of a discipline's concepts and theories. And unless students are aware of the questions that have been asked about a particular phenomenon within the framework of a certain theory and social/historical context, it is unlikely that they will apprehend those aspects considered to be of significance within a given discipline, or across several related disciplines.

My perspective on confluent education in general, and educational technology in particular, is rooted in phenomenology and finds expression in my own model for the systemic (situated, context sensitive), systematic (yet creative), procedural (but not inflexible), client engaged (from setting objectives through evaluation), empirical (if reasonable folks cannot come to some agreement about how to judge whether or not our program has been effective, we are out of the domain of technology), restricted (not all solutions to problems inherent in teaching and learning are instructional in nature) design of instruction (1996b). The brand of phenomenology I draw upon makes much of a very real and "discoverable" primordial existence. Our actions, and resultant perceptions, disclose to us cosmological, epistemological, and axiological truths, not just linguistic conventions. There is "something rather than nothing," it can be apprehended, and moral imperatives exist beyond social conventions (1996c). Have you met any sane, mature people who act otherwise in the care of their own children?

Validation of a Discipline-Based Approach to Formal Education

Long ago, confluent education pioneer Stewart Shapiro and his colleagues (1975) followed the procedural guidelines for an ordinary language conceptual analysis to clarify how the term "confluent education" commonly was used. The consensus of the research team was that "confluent education" is "a deliberate, purposeful evocation by responsible,

identifiable agents of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and feelings which flow together to produce wholeness in the person and society" (p. 119). They concluded that, as such, confluent education is distinct from experience-based education, psychological education, affective education, emotional education, and personal-growth methods, especially in that it includes: "1. external structure which integrates subject matter and personal awareness, 2. an intellectual component, and 3. abstract knowledge or information" (p. 118).

Those who think that the sort of discipline-based inquiry I now advocate is archaic, might listen to the words of Albert Shanker, long-time (deceased early 1997) President of the American Federation of Teachers: "A discipline is not an arbitrary set of restrictions that keeps us from seeing the whole picture. It is an essential body of information, built up over the centuries, about how to explore a particular area of knowledge" (1995, p. 5). He added that:

> Children are not born with disciplinary knowledge. They develop it as they learn what questions they can ask in history and math and science and literature, and how they can answer them. And the K-12 years are essential to this process. . . . It is then that teachers begin to help children learn that you don't look at the structure of a leaf using the same tools that you use to examine the structure of a poem about trees—even though both could be part of an interdisciplinary unit about nature. (p. 5)

Shanker had a way of helping us maintain perspective, especially useful in these times of awesomely rapid technological change and socio/political instability. He joined with E. D. Hirsch Jr. (*Cultural Literacy*, the Core Knowledge curriculum, *The Schools we Need and Why We Don't Have Them*) in advocating that students be given good doses of subject matter content as a prerequisite to productive engagement in inquiry. "Prospective teachers," wrote Shanker (1997):

> are often indoctrinated with the idea that they should "teach the student, not the subject." This means focusing on the process of learning—on "problem solving," "higher-order thinking skills," and "critical thinking," rather than [on] American history or *Macbeth* or W.E.B. Du Bois. The terms may sound impressive, but without content, students don't have anything to think about—or, probably, any interest in thinking. Subject matter . . . is the life's bread of learning. (p. 5)

The legendary Ralph Tyler, too, in a 1994 interview, reminded us one last time that: "The school is composed of a body of teachers who value scholarship. The school's role is to help children—and later, adults—discover scholarly activity" (Hiatt, 1994, p. 786).

Linda Darling-Hammond (1996) and her colleagues at Teachers College, Columbia University, have described practices of "teachers who seem to succeed at developing real understanding of challenging subjects—and who seem able to do so for an array of students who include those traditionally thought to be at risk . . ." (p. 11). Consistent with the implications I have drawn from the phenomenological philosophy of Merleau-Ponty, they

found that such teachers:

> develop engaging tasks that give students meaningful work to do, projects and performances that use the methods of a field of study and represent a whole piece of work within that field: doing historical research, writing and "publishing" a short book, developing a computer simulation or scale model. (p. 11)

Immersion in methods of inquiry that characterize modern versions of traditional disciplines (e.g., the National Science Education Standards developed by the National Academy of Sciences) increasingly is countering the unstructured explorations ("experiential learning") spawned by a generation of fringe pragmatist and overzealous constructivists. "What has been missing in education," said a science teacher working as a program director at the National Science Foundation,

> is an effective way to impart the basic skills that the scientist brings to the lab: how to frame questions, how to attempt to answer those questions through experimentation, how to communicate results, and how to test answers to see if they hold up. (Devitt, 1997, p. 43)

Terry Devitt (1997) quoted this and other teachers' illustrations of computer technology facilitating data collection and analysis, and the sharing of results for scientists and students alike. For example, in the words of another teacher,

> We're trying to bridge the gap between science and education. It's in a project like this—where students have a chance to interact with scientists, conduct research, and publish it online—that we are seeing them respond in ways we've never seen before. . . . This kind of wonder, this kind of excitement, should be made available, needs to be made available, to young people everywhere . . . . (Devitt, 1997, p. 43)

Richard Prawat, in his critique of the view that physical engagement is a **necessary** condition for learning, drew upon John Dewey's claim that **ideas**, not reflection per se, are essential in guiding the process of solving problems, and thus acquiring knowledge. Prawat (1997) continued his synopsis of Dewey's writings with interpretations of the roles of teachers and academic disciplines not unlike those I have derived from Merleau-Ponty.

> Individuals are unlikely to develop scientific thinking and the experimental method on their own. A classroom learning community is the ideal vehicle for cultivating a discerning eye, which is at the core of the method and mode of thought. In such a setting, the disposition to view objects and events in new and imaginative ways must be modeled by the teacher, who must take care to avoid the extremes of being a dispenser of knowledge on the one hand, or a mere facilitator on the other. . . . In their efforts to develop the experimental

> method and mode of thought in students, Dewey writes, teachers have access to a valuable set of instruments, namely powerful ideas developed within the disciplines. These ideas, being specific enough to illuminate the particular and general enough to move beyond it, are just the right "size" to promote the sort of thinking that is the hallmark of the experimental method and mode of thought. (p. 21)

Those who still question the value of discipline-based inquiry, adapted to accord with student abilities and learning styles, may heed the words of James Greeno (1997).

> Learning to learn through the activities of inquiry involving discourse that includes formulating and evaluating questions and problems, as well as solutions and conclusions, and proposing and criticizing explanations, arguments, and examples is crucial to meaningful participation in the activities of our society. These practices of active learning have major importance in individuals' work and in their lives as citizens; therefore, to the extent that we exclude these practices from our students' learning activities, we seriously short-change them. (p. 11)

Thus, I have become ever more confident that as we enthusiastically engage our students in various modes of discipline-based analysis, inquiry, and synthesis activities, they will begin drawing implications from their observations and initiating their own inquiries as required by the new questions raised and the problems encountered. Participation in such "scholarly apprenticeships" would give students valuable insights into the nature of knowing, per se, and would serve as ideal preparation for those individuals who ultimately will contribute to the advance of knowledge within and across the disciplines. Consistent with what may be considered the highest aim of confluent education, they ultimately would learn to **conduct their own lives with integrity**, based on the **integration of knowledge and acts of love**, which is wisdom.

Restatement of my Premises and Conclusions

As I read *Advances in Confluent Education*, I searched for areas where authors had expressed views having elements in common or in contrast with mine (see below). I found that Tone Kvernbekk, the other philosopher, drew heavily on John Dewey's concept of "trying and undergoing," sort of a generic conception of active inquiry. My conception focuses more on those modes of inquiry that have led, and continue to lead, to substantive advances in knowledge within and across disciplines. Where I differed with Tone was primarily in her identification of "experiential learning" with confluent education (such unsystematic learning, for me, is a **prerequisite** to informed, discipline-based inquiry). Interpretation of the aim of confluent education by other authors to increasing awareness of the self in relation to self (intrapersonal) and others (interpersonal, social), moved me to clarify more precisely my own position in the list of assertions that follow.

- The defining essence of "confluent education" is captured in its aim of achieving integration of cognitive and affective dimensions of learning.
- When cognition and affect are defined in terms of two intimately related dimensions of human consciousness, their "integration" or "confluence" is a matter of logical necessity, not a state that can be achieved by human effort.
- It makes no sense to seek achievement of states of being that already exist by logical necessity.
- The kind of knowledge most valued (as reflected in school, district, state, and national standards) in public schools is that rooted in theories and methods of academic disciplines, including both arts and sciences, history as well as philosophy.
- Within the context of confluent education, integration of the various dimensions of learning is a sensible aim when the cognitive is thought of in terms of knowledge (not a faculty of the mind nor just information), the affective in terms of purpose, intentionality, and value (not just moods and feelings), and the behavioral (psychomotor) in terms of intentional, purposeful, systematic actions of aware agents (not just whimsical, passive, nor even high-spirited activities).

- Intentional actions of aware agents are "purposive."
- Experiential learning may or may not be explicitly and consciously guided by purpose.
- Even systematic purposive behavior that results in experiential learning may be fueled by virtue or vice, and guided by fact or fiction.
- Confluent education is not the same as experiential learning, nor does all purposive behavior lead to confluent learning.

- One philosophical assumption of Gestalt psychology is the rejection of reductionism, holding instead to the view that interactions among a system's parts give rise to "emergent properties" that cannot be explained fully based on knowledge of properties of the parts in isolation (out of context).
- Confluent education surely is anti-reductionistic, but its aims and methods might well be quite different from those of Gestalt psychology.
- The "self" is more fruitfully thought of as an engaged, perspectival **subject** of inquiry than as Gestalt or cognitive psychologists' object of study or target of enrichment activities.
- Education is an interhuman, moral enterprise having aims deemed to be worthwhile.
- The aims of education, being worthwhile to **both** individuals and society, may differ in many respects from those of the academic discipline and practice of psychology (e.g., "mental health," "self-awareness").
- Concepts interpreted within the context of one sub-discipline (e.g., Gestalt psychology) can not precisely be interpreted within another (e.g., confluent education). Doing so is called "equivocation," a source of much confusion,

mystification, and misguided action.

- Some forms of therapy might also be educational, but the enterprise of education differs in many respects from that of psychotherapy. Schooling, in particular, is not a form of therapy and teachers are not (neither by training nor contract) psychotherapists.
- Psychology in general, and Gestalt psychology in particular, are not good models for education in general, nor schooling in particular.

Alternative Conceptions of Confluent Education

Interpretations Rooted in Philosophy. Tone Kvernbekk (1996) wrote about a "material world" with which we interact. It becomes known to us as we deliberately "try" things out, and consciously "undergo" the consequences (from John Dewey). But, for the pragmatist, reality is neither material nor ideal. It is composed of interactions between agents and whatever it is they appear to be encountering.

Hackbarth (1996c) wrote that: "The brand of phenomenology I draw upon makes much of a very real and 'discoverable' primordial existence. Our actions, and resultant perceptions, disclose to us cosmological, epistemological, and axiological truths, not just groundless game playing and linguistic convention. There is 'something rather than nothing,' it can be apprehended, and moral imperatives exist beyond social conventions." The ground for claiming the existence of a primordial existence is rooted in reflections upon what we perceive and apprehend; it is not to be confused with the dogma of naive scientific realism that leads some to think of perfect correspondence between scientific knowledge and "things-in-themselves" or the external, real world.

Both cosmological views appear to escape epistemological relativism, and thus contrast favorably with radical constructivism.

Kvernbekk (1996) wrote that: "In order to learn something significant about the world and construct personally meaningful knowledge we must participate, engage in interaction with other people and with the material world. . . . the epistemology of confluent education is essentially relational. . . . experiential learning . . . integrates the cognitive and the affective domains. . . . The confluent concept of experience and experiential learning clearly involves senses, fantasy, and emotions, but not as divorced from intellect and knowledge. . . . Experience is not a mode of sensation; it involves discernment of relationships in the world and between inquirer and the world. Inquiry is action and experience, but it is action informed by theory. . . . I have described confluent education in terms of a participator view of knowledge; a view that states that the knower is an actor who interacts with the social and natural world and gains his knowledge from within the activity. . . . The confluent concept of experience involves activity, thinking, and feeling. . . . The pragmatist [Dewey & James] concept of experience comes close to the confluent concept. Both highlight experiential learning and the importance of the meta-view. There is clearly a difference in emphasis, however. The affective domain is given a much more prominent place in confluent education." I do not know what sense of affect is meant here, perhaps excitement, passion, etc., but the emphasis on active knowledge-making through concerted action is clear.

Hackbarth (1996a) wrote that: "From the perspective of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy,

the affective dimension of the learning of scholars and scientists is manifested in the distinctive structures of their inquiry behaviors, structures that have been cultivated and refined by disciplined (in both senses) study and years of experience. . . . Each of the academic disciplines, and the inter-disciplinary connections among them, contribute content to the school curriculum that students are required to assimilate as an essential component of their full human development. The knowledge that they contain, rooted in fully engaged perception (contrasted with the presumed objective, detached gaze of scientism), constitutes the cognitive dimension of learning when viewed from the perspective of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy." Affect, here, has little to do with warm fuzzies that may accompany the process of learning. In this context it appears to refer to whatever values, motives, and intentions are being manifested in the structures of behavior of those seeking knowledge. Active knowledge-making here is seen in the context of, but not limited to, the distinctive behaviors that characterize scholars in each discipline. Alternative ways of knowing, including mystical, religious, and whimsical, are not excluded.

Note absence of references to the affective dimension of learning in terms of merely enjoying the experience, or being thrilled (or disgusted) by what was discovered. Affectivity is portrayed as integral to the action purposely engaged in to acquire knowledge. The passion that scholars may feel for their subject is secondary to the actions they take in its pursuit, actions that disclose more fully the true and full nature of their affect than anything they might say about how much they love their careers. Note that while Kvernbekk places much emphasis on "experiential learning," to the extent that this is a result of unsystematic inquiry

I consider it a prerequisite to integrated learning, learning that takes place in the context of theories and methods of the disciplines.

Interpretations Rooted in Psychology. Other authors claim roots in Gestalt psychology (foci on self, awareness, and context), though much of their position appears to be captured well in Rheta DeVries' (1997) summary of Jean Piaget. "According to Piaget," she wrote:

> affectivity is both intrapersonal (need, interest, effort, etc.) and interpersonal (attractions, etc.). In a more specific sense, Piaget took the position that every scheme (psychologically organized action) has both cognitive and affective elements and that these are indissociable. (p. 6)

Lisa DeMeulle and Marianne D'Emidio-Caston wrote that: "During the 1960s, many educators began a re-exploration of teaching approaches to educate learners as whole human beings. This was done by addressing both cognition and affect, which includes values, emotions, and personal beliefs, as an integral part of learning. . . . In reaction to the transmission paradigm, the primary goal of early confluent educators was the integration of cognition and affect in individual and group learning, with an emphasis placed on the self as an object of study. . . . [A] newer orientation reflected the constructive and interactive nature of the learning process (affective/cognitive/psychomotor), as it occurs within the individual (intrapersonal) and between the individual and the environment (social contextual). . . . the outcome of confluent education [now] goes beyond self-awareness. . . . Confluent educators

also attempt to facilitate a greater awareness of the interactive processes involved in learning. Our goal is to generate in the learner an awareness of their self-construction of knowledge within a given context. . . . Thus, in addition to understanding the need for confluence of cognition and affect within the intrapersonal and interpersonal dimensions, we now recognize that a third dimension has to be acknowledged in the learning process: the social contextual dimension."

Early confluent educators are said to have somehow "addressed" both cognition and affect. They apparently rejected the notion of systematic direct instruction with its assumptions about substantive knowledge embodied in subject matter. Note that E.D. Hirsch Jr. has recently defended his views on the value of students mastering essential content as a prerequisite for productive inquiry. Albert Shanker endorsed this view, as did I in my chapter. DeMeulle and D'Emidio-Caston state further that emphasis was placed on the "self" as an object of study; this apparently in opposition to substantive knowledge about the "world." I do not know what sort of "object" the "self" might be taken to be. The "newer orientation" has much to do with awareness of one's role in learning. Kvernbekk and I agree that learners must be consciously active in the analysis of situations, the posing of questions, the selection of methods, the seeking of solutions, the analysis of data, the drawing of implications, etc. Is this what DeMeulle and D'Emidio-Caston mean by "awareness"? When they write of intrapersonal, interpersonal, and social dimensions, is it what now goes by the term "situated cognition"? Can confluent education be distinguished from any other brand in terms of its concern for context? I don't think so.

DeMeulle and D'Emidio-Caston continue: "We now view confluent education as a conceptual framework that emphasizes the integration of cognition and affect by creating an awareness of the relationships among the above three dimensions [intrapersonal, interpersonal, social contextual]. This framework transforms the transmission paradigm by giving recognition to both externally held knowledge as well as the self-construction of knowledge, and perhaps most importantly, the interactions between the two. I like this passing reference to the value of knowledge in a sense other than purely subjective. Peter Airasian and Mary Walsh (1997) observed that: "Because students always make their own meaning from instruction, the important curricular and instructional choice is not a choice between making and not making personal meaning from instructional activities, but a choice among the ideas, concepts, and issues (and methods I would add) that we want our students to construct meaning about" (p. 447). Airasian and Walsh (consistent with Hirsch, Shanker, and my chapter), find ample room in their model for traditional approaches to instruction as complements to "experiential" and confluent approaches: "One's task is to find the right balance between the activities of constructing and receiving knowledge, given that not all aspects of a subject can or should be taught in the same way or be acquired solely through 'hands-on' or student-centered means" (p. 447).

DeMeulle and D'Emidio-Caston assert that: "Because affect, cognition, and physical experience are inseparable, any attempt to understand one without understanding its relation to the other two is limited, at best." But then what sense can be made of confluent education's expressed aim to achieve integration of cognitive, affective, and psychomotor dimensions of learning?

Conclusions

If confluent education is to thrive as a movement, clarification of and agreement upon basic concepts (at the least), if not implications, needs to take place. UCSB's own Stewart Shapiro and I have long agreed that confluent education is distinct from experience-based education, psychological education, affective education, emotional education, and personal-growth methods, especially in that it includes external structure that integrates subject matter and personal awareness, an intellectual component, and abstract knowledge (Shapiro, 1975, p. 118).

In my view, one coherent conception of confluent education entails active engagement of students in what I have characterized as "impassioned scholarly apprenticeships." Within this context of discipline-based, guided inquiry, modeled by teachers and adapted for students, the cognitive has substance, the affective potency and purpose, and the behavioral direction. Thus, these dimensions of human learning can be integrated, not by logical, linguistic, or biological necessity, but by acts of will, and especially in the context of intense, spirited collaborations among students and teachers.

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